

QUESTIONS REDUX | WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:13–16)

Questions abound. Answers differ. Debates develop. Fill a locker room with avid golfers, pose a question about anything golf-related, and you have a perfect recipe for debates—sometimes healthy, sometimes heated.

Many of these discussions are important; some are trivial. But overall, the game of golf, by its very nature, lends itself to dialogue and debate. Like other debates outside of golf, “tradition versus progress” lies beneath many disagreements.

The diversity of perspectives is intriguing: the rollback controversy, harvesting trees on historic courses, anchoring putters, bifurcation, driver technology, groove specifications, penalties for slow play, and managing fan behavior—to name but a few.

With the massive expansion of the game and the influx of inexperienced players since the 2020 pandemic, new points of controversy are arising around on-course etiquette and clubhouse decorum.

Questions persist. Some questions, in and outside of golf, transcend cultures and times. Yet no question is more important than those asked by Jesus. Among the many questions Jesus poses, one rises to the level of ultimate: “Who do you say that I am?”

In his generation, the answers were all over the board. Some argued he was John the Baptist, others Jeremiah, others Elijah, and still others—threatened by his miracles and teaching—argued he was the Devil personified.

Every generation since has discussed, debated, and disagreed over the answer to that question first posed to the disciples. Who is qualified to judge, with any objectivity, the right answer to this question that refuses to go away?

Surveying the answers throughout the ages is both fascinating and alarming. Many responses tell us more about those giving the answer than about the historical figure named Jesus. It becomes clear that most answers are designed to answer a different question: “Who do you want Jesus to be?”

Every movement wants to recruit Jesus as the poster child for its cause. Secular humanists categorize him as a great moral teacher. Marxists present him as a political revolutionary championing the poor. Muslims honor him as a prophet yet deny his deity.

Judaism respects him as a rabbi but rejects him as Israel’s Messiah. New Age spirituality treats him as an enlightened guru. Atheists reduce him to a merely human preacher or dismiss him as a legend altogether.

But the pressing question is not whether he is influential, inspiring, or a mere legend; it is whether he is who Peter confessed him to be—the promised Messiah and the eternal Son of God.

We might wonder why opinions are so diverse and disagreements so intense. The apostle Paul gets to the heart of the problem in 2 Corinthians 3:13 and 4:4.

There he argues that, apart from the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-inspired writings of those who knew Jesus personally, humanity will always distort Jesus’ identity in a futile effort to recast him in its own image and recruit him to its own agendas.

Notwithstanding the massively wrongheaded and endless false reporting over centuries about his identity, Jesus is still who he always was and will forever be—the eternal Son of God accurately portrayed in the pages of Scripture.

In his book *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal addresses the irrational posture of those who never explore the Christian faith with honest examination but dismiss it without investigation.

He writes, “Among those who do not believe, I make a vast difference between those who strive with all their power to inform themselves, and those who live without thinking about it.”

Refusing to face the importance of the question of Jesus’ identity—whether through indifference or avoiding it with ever-increasing distractions—is to neglect the most important question one will ever ask.

Ignoring the question does not abolish it. Disregarding it is utter folly. Wrestling with it and getting the answer right changes one’s life for all eternity.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts to understand.

READING: Matthew 16:13-16; 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 and 4:1-6.

1. What 2 or 3 hotly debated issues in the game of golf concern you? With civility, discuss and debate among your Links Fellowships various perspectives.

2. In Matthew 16:13–16, Jesus moves from “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” to “But who do you say that I am?” How does that shift from general opinion to personal confession challenge you today?

3. The devotional lists many ways different groups “recast” Jesus to fit their own agendas. In what subtle ways are you tempted to shape Jesus into who you want him to be, rather than submitting to who Scripture reveals him to be?

4. Pascal distinguishes between those who honestly investigate faith and those who “live without thinking about it.” What would it look like, practically, for you to “strive with all your power to inform yourself” about Jesus’ identity in this season of your life?

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